

Family Faith Formation Program Handbook

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INTRODUCTION

Dear Family,

Thank you for your interest in Family Faith Formation at St. Andrew Catholic Church. The fact that you're reading this letter means that you have a commitment to the faith formation of your child; for that I thank you and honor you. This handbook presents all the information you need for your family to be successful in our program.

Before all the details, though, I wanted to take a moment to present to you an idea I find incredibly important and, for some, often overlooked. Faith Formation is NOT just another extracurricular. Faith Formation is a ministry of the Church; all of us who work in it consider ourselves extended members of your family of faith dedicated to providing your family more chances to encounter God. And as indicated by its name, Family Formation is NOT about education, but about providing experiences. Our most important job is inviting families to deepen their discipleship, to be better followers of Jesus in the way you live your life.

Because we view ourselves this way (not an academic enterprise but a ministry of making disciples) we ask you to relate to us this way. Know that if you're struggling because there's illness or job loss or child care stress or anything that might disrupt the normal participation of your family in this program, we want to know about it. First, so we can join you in praying about it. Second, so we can see if there's any way we can help you. And finally, so we don't 'hold it against you' when it comes time to send out letters about participation records and sacramental preparation. We understand that things happen and families have hard times. We want to be here for you, as members of your extended family of faith.

So, if something happens (bad or good – let us celebrate with you as well!), let us know about it. Communication is so important to us. We want to be in relationship with you. We want to know you. We want to pray for you and with you. Please help us by being in touch. We put our contact information on the cover for this reason. We look forward to hearing from you.

In gratitude,



Jerry Harrington (aka "Mr. H.")
Director of Faith Formation

PURPOSES OF FAMILY FAITH FORMATION

Why do we have a Family Faith Formation Program?



TO HELP

The most important faith teachers in a child's life is their parent, grandparent, guardian, and family. A few hours a month cannot replace what your children learn from you. We take seriously the idea that our job is to help you be better faith shapers of your children.



TO CONNECT

Family Faith Formation connects you to your parish community and your children to other children being raised as Catholics. It's important that we remember we are not alone in following Jesus, in doing what's right instead of what's convenient, in being Church.



TO PREPARE

Family Faith Formation partners with families to see children prepared to receive Sacraments.



TO EXPAND

Family Faith Formation expands your family's experiences of God, encounters with Jesus, and awareness of the Holy Spirit. To do that, we tell stories, discuss our lives, teach things, play games, and pray for and with each other. We do far more than teach; we catechize.



TO REMIND

Family Faith Formation reminds families that the most important thing we do as Catholics is attend Sunday worship together as a community and so will always repeat:

MASS IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN CLASS!

If you do not attend Mass as a family, coming to Family Faith Formation does NOT make sense.

PROGRAM VISION

Philosophy (Why We Do It This Way)

We first learn about God and live according to God’s teachings in our family:

“Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child’s earliest years. This already happens when family members help one another to grow in faith by the witness of a Christian life in keeping with the Gospel. Family catechesis precedes, accompanies, and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith. Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God. The parish is the Eucharistic community and the heart of the liturgical life of Christian families; it is a privileged place for the catechesis of children and parents.”

(Catechism of the Catholic Church 2226)

Faith is not an academic subject. Faith is a relationship, a series of relationships in fact: with God, with family, with community. As a parish, we provide families a place to gather, a story to learn, a prayer life to grow, a set of teachings to embrace, and Sacraments to celebrate Jesus alive and real in our lives. As a Faith Formation Department, we offer this program as the best way to meet these responsibilities (as described above in Purposes of Family Faith Formation).

Scope (Who Is This For)

The full Family Faith Formation Program offers growth in faith to all families with children in grades 1-8. For those children who have not received First Holy Communion, the Sacrament Preparation process in the Diocese of Venice takes two years. Thus, a family with children in need of Sacraments participates for two years, with First Holy Communion usually happening in May of the second year. For any family wanting to continue to grow in faith together, they are welcome to continue participating with us until their youngest child enters grade 9.

Other Faith Formation Programs for Children

These programs are not described in detail in this handbook because they involve the sacramental preparation of older youth and are administered outside the Family Faith Formation program run on weeknights as described in this handbook. If you have children in these circumstances, contact the Faith Formation Office for more information on these programs.



CONFIRMATION

Confirmation Program for Youth in Grades 9+ who have received Eucharist



INITIATION

Sacrament Program for Baptized Children in Grades 8+



RCIA-Y

(Rite of Christian Initiation adapted for Youth)

Initiation Program for Unbaptized Children in Grades 9+

PROGRAM VISION (cont.)

Family-based (How This Works)

Our Family Faith Formation program is family-based. In other words, it does NOT involve a classroom or groups of children separated from their families. Rather, parents (or adult guardians) fulfill their responsibility to be the primary catechists of their children by leading them through the program. Thus, we enroll families into the program, not children. Families complete Home Sessions of Content Programs, on their own schedule, according to monthly deadlines as well as participate in twice monthly Church Sessions during which we gather as a community.

Sacrament Preparation

Our Bishop (of the Diocese of Venice in Florida) has determined that all preparation for the reception of Sacraments by youth be a two-year process. Thus, if your child has yet to receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion he or she will be placed in our First-Year Program (called Loved, see below). Then, in the child's second year with us they will be placed in Blessed, our Sacrament Program.

Language

While all our catechesis is performed in English (by Diocesan rule) we recognize the fact that many of our families are bilingual, with parents speaking and reading primarily Spanish while the children speak and read English. To better include Spanish-speaking parents in their children's faith formation process we have chosen bilingual materials for all our programs whenever possible. This change did not increase the cost of our materials. For more specific information, see the Program Descriptions below.

PROGRAM VOCABULARY

Church Sessions

Twice a month, families attend Church Sessions, an opportunity for us to gather as a community, meet other families in the parish, share our faith, and connect our lives with the liturgy, the Christian story as it unfolds throughout the Church's year. While sessions will vary wildly in format, the content will always connect our lives to Sunday Masses and involve the family completing a written activity called the Turn In, which serves as their attendance record for that session.

Family Crews

Furthermore, we will place families into smaller groups we are calling Family Crews. Each family will have an assigned seat in the church according to these crews. Family Crews provide an opportunity for families to get to know other families, building community within our parish. Family Crews will also each be assigned a Catechist-Companion who will walk with the crew through the program and assist families in a few ways (for more, see Volunteers Section below).



Home Sessions

Each month, we expect families to complete the scheduled Content Program assigned to the children in the family.

Content Programs



Loved

Any child who has never been in formal faith formation at the parish (it's their first year with us) completes the Loved Content Program (using a workbook called Knowing Our Catholic Faith from Loyola Press: <https://www.loyolapress.com/faith-formation/religion-readiness/knowning-our-catholic-faith>).



Blessed

Any child in their second year of formal faith formation at the parish (a second-year child expecting to receive First Holy Communion in May) participates in the Blessed Content Program (using a video-based program from Dynamic Catholic: dynamiccatholic.com/blessed).



Formed

And any children who have already received First Holy Communion participates in the Formed Content Program (using selections from the parish resource website formed.org). See Practical Matters below for more information.

PRACTICAL MATTERS

Program Calendar

September to June

Church Session Day

Tuesday OR Wednesday (two times a month)

Church Session Time

6:00 pm—7:00 pm

Church Session Practicalities

As mentioned above, we assign all families to a place in the main nave of the Church according to Family Crews. Due to public health concerns during this time of the COVID-19 Pandemic we will be spacing families as much as possible, assigning each family an end of an open pew, according to a map that will be sent to you prior to our first Church Session and available online.

We ask that everyone consult the seating map ahead of time and plan accordingly in terms of parking and entering and exiting the Church. We will have all three doors (north, south, and east) open and ask that families enter and exit through the door that corresponds to their assigned section in church. By doing so, we can maximize physical distancing between families. Leaving your Turn In in the pew will serve as attendance record, so no need to sign in or out. We ask for patience and compassion during entrance and exit times so all can move safely, using the hand sanitizing stations at all the entrances.

PRACTICAL MATTERS (cont.)

Home Session Practicalities

Twice each month, the families will complete lessons based on their Content Program. The Family Faith Formation Calendar you will receive prior to our first Church Session will list the assigned lessons (whether they be to complete certain chapters or watch certain videos). After completing a lesson, the family will go to our website (www.standrewrcc.org), find their Content Program page, and complete an online Digital Turn In (like the paper Turn In for Church Session, but done online through a simple Google Form). Submission of the Digital Turn In verifies participation in that lesson and only then 'counts' toward advancement to receive Sacraments.

Participation

Participation demonstrates commitment and priority. Participation makes the Purposes of Family Faith Formation possible (see that page above). Participation includes attending Mass on Sundays, Church Sessions*, an essential part of our program, and completing Home Sessions.

**Pandemic Note: Due to public health concerns over the transmission of the novel coronavirus, if your family would prefer not to come to Church Sessions in person, for the duration of the pandemic Church Sessions will also be live streamed online and a Digital Turn In made available to any family that 'attends' via online live stream. Submission of these Digital Turn Ins will be required for participation in the Church session to be registered.*

As a general guideline, we ask that absences or missing submissions be limited to three during the program year (that count includes Turn Ins at Church Sessions as well as Digital Turn Ins for Home Sessions).

Participation (cont.)

We understand that life sometimes gets challenging and sacrifices must be made. Whenever you know your family will not be in attendance or cannot complete a Home Session, please contact us. We note every call, email, etc. and take it into account when determining consequences of lack of participation (such as delaying the reception of a Sacrament). If you didn't, please read the letter that introduces this handbook.

REGISTRATION

Timing

Registration for the new academic year begins in the month of August.

Process

There are two parts to the Registration Process:

[Part 1: Parish Registration](#)

To participate in Family Faith Formation, a family must be registered members of St. Andrew Church. Thus, if a family participated last year, they skip this step. If a family is new and not registered in the parish, they must complete a Parish Registration, available online at www.standrewrcc.org/parishregistration.

[Part 2: Family Faith Formation Registration](#)

This year we are asking everyone to complete their Family Faith Formation Registration and make payment online.

REGISTRATION (cont.)

Cost

Our Family Faith Formation Program does not receive parish subsidies and so must charge fees that cover our costs. Every family will be charged a basic fee of \$30 per child that covers the program costs for the year. In addition, any child in the second year (First Holy Communion year) will be charged an additional \$20 per child.

Payment Methods

We ask as many families as possible to make payment electronically by credit or debit card (using the parish's payment processing platform) during the online registration process. If you cannot pay electronically, we will accept cash or check (made payable to "St. Andrew Church") by making arrangements to bring payment to the Faith Formation Office (239.574.2411).

Late Registration

If you miss registration in August and want to enter Family Faith Formation, your family is always welcome. The date of your registration will be noted in your attendance record. Unfortunately, pro-rated fees are not possible as they mostly cover the cost of materials that is the same regardless of start date. And finally, a special note: if registering for a first-year program and your child begins after October 15, your child must repeat that first-year program the next year, unless special arrangements are made with the Director.

VOLUNTEERS

Overview

The ministry of Family Faith Formation could not exist without the dedicated team of volunteers who generously give of their time, talents, and love every week. More important than any expertise, certification, education, or preparation, we want volunteers who love Jesus, pray and attend Mass, enjoy children, and try to live the best they can. In other words, if you attempt to live a good Catholic life, you qualify! The rest, we can teach you. If you would spend some time thinking about and (more importantly) praying about the following roles in our program, we'd appreciate it.

Church Helper

Church Helpers, well, help in the Church. These individuals help families find their places, make sure that anyone waiting for a quiet room restroom does so with physical distancing, provides families with pencils or extra copies of Turn Ins when needed, and helps communication between families and Faith Formation staff. These individuals move about the Church, so families don't have to. This role is perfect for teens in need of community service hours.



VOLUNTEERS (cont.)

Catechist—Companion

The Catechist-Companion has four main responsibilities:
Community:

Building Community

By leading a Family Crew – getting to know the families, helping the families get to know each other, working with families to make sure their Home Sessions are done well and their Church Sessions are meaningful

Accountability

Having access to their crew’s Home Session Digital Turn Ins, Catechist-Companions will monitor family responses to make sure they’re being submitted and offer assistance when they’re not (and communicating with the Director if an ongoing lack of participation becomes apparent)

Church Session Leadership

Helping present or working with their assigned Family Crew during Church Sessions

Personal Faith Formation

Catechist-Companions will continue growing in their own faith through a Diocesan Certification Program (an online curriculum done at one’s own pace throughout the first year or more of volunteering).

This role is most crucial to the success of our program and should only be undertaken by those with a deep love of Jesus, the Church, and families, who can reasonably expect to fulfill the above responsibilities. If you are interested but unsure of yourself, contact the director to have a conversation.

Preconditions

In order to work with children in a church in the Diocese of Venice, all adult volunteers must pay for and undergo a criminal background check as well as attend a two-hour Safe Environment Training class. For more information, contact the Religious Education Office.

FINAL WORD

In Joy of the Gospel Pope Francis wrote: “On the lips of the catechist the first proclamation must ring out over and over:

‘Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen, and free you.’” (164)

To remind people of that proclamation is the reason we have Religious Education. Spend a few moments reminding yourself of it now and then share it with your children.

